

The Startling Realism of Apocalyptic Horror Fiction

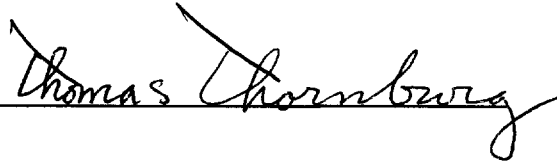
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis:

This discussion of apocalyptic horror fiction is limited to two works of fiction: Robert R. McCammon's Swan Song and Stephen King's The Stand. There is an exploration of the background of horror fiction in contemporary culture and a discussion of the different styles of each author. The focus of the thesis will be to show the intellectual value of apocalyptic horror fiction as it pertains to politics, social problems, people and their lives, religion, and symbolism.

The Startling Realism of Apocalyptic Horror Fiction

Anticipation begins to build as the young teenage girl approaches the barn where only seconds earlier she had heard the high pitched wail of someone in agony. She crosses the screen cautiously, yet seems unaware of the imminent danger music that has become so cliché for the 1980's horror film. She turns the corner and lets out a wild cacophony of horrifying screams.

The previous fictional excerpt could have come from a myriad of low-budget, no-plot horror films that littered the screen in the late 1970's and all throughout the 1980's. Unfortunately, this is the type of scenario that most people associate with horror, whether in films or novels. These works have created the impression for some that horror fiction, a genre that has existed for over two centuries, is devoid of any contemporary social value. My argument addresses a genre of fiction that has received little recognition despite its outstanding literary value. Apocalyptic horror fiction, a type of horror deserving very special attention, is often broad in scope; hence, it can deal effectively with a great many issues. I will use two particular novels as representative works of apocalyptic horror fiction. They will stand to disprove the notion that apocalyptic horror fiction has little intellectual value. One of the books that I will deal with is The Stand by Stephen King. Although King has achieved a great deal of popular success, by no means do I infer that popular success equals intellectual value. There are numerous examples in modern culture to disprove that equation. I will demonstrate that

King's novel shows merit based upon the work itself. The other novel that I will use is Swan Song by Robert R. McCammon. Although not nearly as well known as Stephen King, McCammon makes some very powerful statements in Swan Song. I will use these novels to defend apocalyptic horror fiction and to disprove the notion created through the melee of 1980's horror films that all horror is devoid of intellectual value. Obviously, there is some apocalyptic horror that does fall into the category of worthless fiction, but a good portion of it proves my point. Apocalyptic horror fiction deserves a worthy place in literature because of its realism in portraying the human condition.

Before I proceed with defending apocalyptic horror , I will lay a groundwork for the current state of horror fiction in general. There has been a great deal of criticism concerning horror fiction in the last fifteen years. Much of this criticism has flowed over from criticism of horror films during the 1980's. Few adults in the United States have not heard of the Friday the 13th movies and their gratuitous violence. Much of today's criticism of horror stems from such horror films. The arguments against horror having any redeeming social value sprang forth from these types of films; I happen to agree with much of the criticism. However, I do not feel apocalyptic horror is in any way deserving of this criticism.

It became easy in the past decade for a picture studio to throw out a horror film as quickly as possible. After all, it was a low budget way to pull in large amounts of revenue. It was a dream come true for Hollywood. (I am not trying to lay blame on Hollywood alone for the success of this type of film.) No one forced

the millions of viewers to stand in line to see someone dismembered with a chain saw. There are numerous films to pick from as examples. These films have served to tarnish the image of horror in general and, subsequently, apocalyptic horror fiction. There are a few films that truly deserve the title of horror: John Carpenter's Halloween cannot be rivaled for sheer suspense and entertainment. Although definitely not a movie for the squeamish, Clive Barker's Hellraiser rivals Dante's Inferno for sheer imagination, although, as usual, Hollywood corrupted a good idea by making five Halloween's and three Hellraiser's. This type of greed has spilled over and tarnished the image of apocalyptic horror.

Movies are not the only items that have tarnished the image of horror fiction. A large amount of horror fiction has damaged its own reputation. All one needs to do is to venture down the fiction aisle of B. Dalton or Waldenbooks to see the shelves cluttered with luridly packaged works that are obviously catering to the same audience that just finished watching Friday the 13th V for the fifth time. I do not always blame the authors for this. Quite often, they have little or nothing to do with the packaging of their works. The covers are created by an artist commissioned by a marketing department that is simply trying to make the novel more enticing to the simple minded reader who is not looking for any type of real depth in a novel.

It is also quite obvious that if there is a market for B movies, there is also a market for equally shallow novels. Throw in some descriptive gore, a paper thin plot, lots of violence, a little sex, stir it around and ... BOOM! A novel bursts out

that deserves the criticism that horror has received. I have no secret formula for determining which horror fiction deserves serious attention and which does not. One can quite honestly feel like he or she is wading through the darkness. I feel that apocalyptic horror fiction is a cut above the rest. Many horror novels can be interesting, but few can portray the human condition with the realism of apocalyptic horror.

Modern horror fiction cannot seem to cross the bridge over to the side of quality literature in the eyes of many people. I know some individuals who think that Cliffs Notes are an all encompassing list of quality fiction. I am glad that modern horror fiction has not evolved to the point of being given the false honor of being deemed worthy enough for Cliffs Notes. For one thing, it makes the reader understand the story through his or her own eyes and not through those of a professor who has no idea what has happened in our world since 1970. I believe that the true magic of any fiction can only be experienced through reading the novel.

Until this point, I have only discussed the reasons for the negative image of horror fiction. Why should anyone read horror fiction? Quite simply, it tells us about ourselves. For example, many horror fiction novels discuss situations of many homeless such as starvation and death. This is not a vision of horror dreamed up to turn the stomach of the squeamish. It is our society and our world. A simple discussion such as this can bring forth so many of the problems that our society faces. Many critics often say that horror fiction sells disfigurement, death,

— and monstrosity. In short, it is immoral. This is an extremely uninformed opinion. Horror fiction addresses the real problems of guns, hate, and racism. These are problems that have to be dealt with, and horror fiction boldly meets these problems head on. Within most horror novels, there is a very strict moral code which all but the villains abide by. In fact, horror fiction is not much different than the Morality plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (King, Danse Macabre, 396). Horror fiction shows us many of the problems in our society in a way that makes us listen. Horror authors scare us into opening our eyes to many of the problems in our world. There is no better way to invoke an emotional response to societal problems than through fear. The value of horror is first to open our eyes to problems and then to emphasize that there is hope. This could not better qualify horror fiction for serious consideration as quality literature.

Horror is a wonderful way to open our eyes to problems because it is not afraid to shake things up a little (Wiater 22). Of course, horror elements should not be thrown in for no reason. Horror elements should be quite secondary to the plot of the novel. These elements are a wonderful way of emphasizing the main thrust of the book, but they should never be the focus of the story:

Horror writers are approaching real horror, but we're doing it in a way that is, hopefully, artistic, and civilized. We're not glorifying madness or murder...or any other 20th century horrors. We're simply trying to make sense out of the chaos and in the process, explore ourselves as well. (Wiater 22).

Horror fiction makes us appreciate life. There is often a great deal of suffering and despair in the novels and it makes us appreciate the life we lead all the more. This is a carpe diem type of message. Reading horror really makes one want to take advantage of all the wonders of life while one has the time left on this planet.

Horror fiction has been around for well over 100 years. It may have been called gothic fiction, but many of the same elements that made these century old novels great are still present in the horror fiction of today. Names like Stoker, Mary Shelley, and Henry James are all given respect for their works in gothic fiction. Each of these authors was able to make a serious point while combining the elements of suspense and terror. These novels have a depth to their stories that can be found again in modern apocalyptic horror. They have withstood the test of time and are now regarded as some of the greatest works of the last two centuries.

Horror fiction opens up unexplained territories. It rarely unties the Gordian Knot but, instead, cuts it boldly in two like Alexander. No other fiction opens so many unexplored doors. These doors can lead anywhere from debating theology to the humor of "civilized" warfare. Most importantly, horror opens our eyes and makes us look at problems that we need to see and contemplate. Horror fiction is obviously not Shakespeare; my arguments to defend apocalyptic horror are not meant to compare the two. Horror fiction is a contemporary literature that deals with modern problems in a manner which one might expect for twentieth century humanity. I admit that sometimes the language and the

description is harsh, but when dealing with our society, it almost has to be. A straightforward look at many of our problems is often a more effective tool than the poetic prose of Shakespeare. I do not say this to try to compare Shakespeare and authors such as Stephen King. Such a comparison would be foolhardy, as much of the beauty of Shakespearian literature is missing from horror fiction. Nevertheless, it very effectively achieves its goal of defining and discussing some of the problems in our society. Just as Beowulf tells us a great deal about the people of England so long ago, horror fiction can tell us much about Americans in the twentieth century. It leaves virtually no stones unturned. It covers politics, economics, theology, society, the workings of the human mind, and many other areas. It lets us know who we are and who we could possibly be. So many people refuse to admit that horror fiction could have anything truthful to say about the state of the human condition. These are oftentimes the same people who refuse to acknowledge the problems of hunger, poverty, crime, homelessness, and wealth disparity unless it begins to affect them directly. Horror explores who we are as a people. It lets us look at what we stand for and shows us that we do have a lot of problems that need to be addressed by more than a handful of people. Who are we? Horror, and especially apocalyptic horror, comes closer than any other type fiction of the twentieth century to answering that question.

Apocalyptic horror fiction can take numerous forms. Both of the novels that I have chosen deal with a great catastrophe that decimates the world's population. Although the novels are similar in that respect, there is only limited similarity in

their portrayal of our world after this catastrophe. Two novels support my stance on the value of apocalyptic horror, helping to give me a broader viewpoint. I feel that using more than one example of the quality of apocalyptic horror gives more credibility to my stance.

It will help my point if one understands the basics of each novel before I go into a discussion about the novels and how they show the quality of apocalyptic horror. I do not intend to summarize the stories of either author. My whole purpose is show the intellectual value of apocalyptic horror.

Stephen King is as widespread a household name as any Hollywood actor, but I did not pick his novel to represent my stance for that reason. I choose The Stand because it fits into the genre of apocalyptic horror and is very strong in illustrating the intellectual value of this type of fiction. The Stand qualifies as apocalyptic horror because it is the story of the battered survivors of a terrible catastrophe. However, a large portion of King's story deals with the lives of people before the catastrophe. In The Stand, an accident occurs with a top secret government experiment involving biological weapons. This accident releases a deadly version of the flu upon America and, subsequently, the world. It spreads quickly and destroys over ninety percent of the world's population. All of the structures and technology are still intact, which plays an important part, but nearly all of the population is gone. Bands of survivors struggle to try to build communities once again. This attempt at reforming society is blocked by an evil, Satan-like figure. King never states that this character is the devil. He leaves

that to the religious convictions of the reader. At the very least, he is the embodiment of evil, greed, and corruption. This dark man, as King calls him, tries to recreate the worst aspects of our society. He serves to rekindle the fires of hatred, warfare and violence within the hearts of people. While one group of survivors struggles to re-create democracy and simple friendship, the dark man recruits survivors to begin arming the weapons that are merely sitting around. He rules with an autocratic hand and wishes to create a society based upon all the negative aspects of humanity. These two groups build their societies and collide at the novel's end.

King says a great deal about humanity in the hundreds of pages before the plague ever takes its toll. His commentary ranges from political to social to theological. In almost any supernatural apocalyptic horror novel, religion is addressed, but King spends more of his time attacking the corruption and secrecy of our supposed democratic government. King spends a large portion of his time in character development so that we feel what the characters feel. By the novel's end, the reader will feel as though he or she has known characters like Stu Redman and Frannie Goldsmith for ten years. This type of character development allows King to effectively express a variety of opinions on different topics and to give a crystal picture of humanity.

Swan Song, by Robert McCammon, is a very unique and original look at apocalyptic horror. His works of Swan Song and novels after it are a very unique type of literature that is very intellectually refreshing. Although not nearly as

well known as The Stand, Swan Song is, in my opinion, the greatest apocalyptic horror fiction novel ever written and one of the best novels of the last fifty years. There is virtually no topic that McCammon does not cover in his story. Swan Song follows a very different path than does The Stand. McCammon spends much less time on the pre-apocalyptic world; instead, he devotes the nearly 1,000 pages to humanity's struggle for survival. Swan Song starts on the day of a nuclear holocaust. Unlike The Stand, everything is virtually decimated. There are no more cities, and one of the most basic struggles within the book is just for the characters to find enough food to stay alive. The reforming of communities in Swan Song is not a quick process like in The Stand. It takes seven years before people begin to rebuild any permanent social structure. There are groups of people that form social groups within those seven years, but those groups are usually armies with only the law of the gun as any type of order. McCammon's descriptions of the snow covered landscape are quite vivid. The plot follows three stories that all meet at the end in one dramatic climax.

Swan Song also has its version of the devil as does The Stand. The Satan-like figure in McCammon's book is a devious and deceptive figure. He causes great chaos and death in the post-apocalyptic world, but he makes human hands do the work. This is quite fitting considering the destruction that humanity wreaked upon itself in the war. Swan Song is much more realistic with its good and evil coming much more from the human condition than it does from any supernatural force. It portrays a cold, dark world where power is available for the

taking.

McCammon's style is much different than King's style. While both writers make great efforts in giving their characters depth, McCammon is able to paint an astounding picture with words. He makes it easy to visualize the barren landscape painted within the novel. This pulls the reader in and makes it easier for McCammon to make his point on various issues. While King spends more of his time on political issues, McCammon devotes his energy to religious issues and symbols of hope. In spite of all the issues and areas that McCammon covers in his novel, the most positive and inspirational aspect is his vision of hope that he displays through various symbolistic items that appear throughout the novel. The story's main character, Swan, has a very special gift that is the key to the survival of the world, but McCammon makes her battle throughout the story. In the end, McCammon has a vision of hope that could bring out the innocent child in all of us.

Both authors cover a broad spectrum of issues and ideas. I will try to look at a number of issues and show how each author covers them in an attempt to show the merit of apocalyptic horror. When it is appropriate, I will try to discuss current issues that illustrate the relevance of the topics that the authors cover. The areas that I will cover follow: politics, social problems, people and their lives, religion, and symbolism.

Both King and McCammon spend considerable time discussing our government and its problems. They have very different ideas on the solutions to

our political problems. Both solutions are quite radical, and in truth, neither are really very feasible alternatives. McCammon views our political system as a huge bureaucratic machine that simply runs out of control. King views our government as corrupted by hidden agendas and secrecy that is kept from the public in the name of national security. At the very least, their ideas about government get us to think about our political system and how much freedom we actually have.

In both stories, the United States government is the cause of the worldwide catastrophe. In The Stand, the catastrophe takes the form of a flu epidemic that wipes out the majority of the world's population. This flu was created by the U.S. government in a biological warfare experimentation facility. A mistake unleashes this ever changing strain of the flu upon civilization. This is definitely not an outlandish scenario considering the events in 1980 surrounding Three Mile Island. In King's book, the flu is released, and yet the government continually denies the existence of a life threatening virus. This is quite plausible considering the documented lies that the government has told us in the name of national security. Of course, it is euphemistically called engaging in dis-information by our government. In The Stand, reporters are forced to air what the government tells them to air. King leads our government down the road toward martial law and yet, does it in an extremely believable way. Even though people are dying by the thousands, the government says a simple shot from your family physician will cure you. In a metaphoric sense, the government avoids the Gordian Knot and simply slashes it in two. After all, confronting and taking responsibility for a

problem is always a difficult task. Just like Watergate and the Iran-Contra affair, King creates a masterful cover-up that truly makes one question our government.

In Swan Song, the world is destroyed by a nuclear holocaust. This quite obviously pulls the government into the forefront of the story. The war begins in the Middle-East. With the fighting that continually occurs in that area currently, McCammon's situation is totally realistic. Some might argue that the threat of nuclear war ended with the demise of the Soviet Union. In reality, the Soviet Union's economy is in shambles and it needs to feed its people. The only commodity it has to sell to buy food is the huge nuclear arsenal that it has lying around. There are plenty of wealthy mid-eastern countries that would be glad to pay top dollar for some of this weaponry. This scenario is very similar to that presented in Swan Song. The initial outbreaks of war are in the Middle-East. In McCammon's story, these countries acquire their weapons through arms traders. Just as in World War I and II, the superpowers are drawn into the conflict by alliances with smaller powers.

Although the government is to blame in both novels, McCammon and King have very differing portrayals of the government. McCammon sees our government as a huge machine that virtually cannot be stopped. It is out of control and running itself through a myriad of branches and layers. Of course, we have a president, but in McCammon's mind he is merely a figure-head with no real control over the government. In Swan Song, the president realizes that he is merely a figure head and that he has inherited the mistakes of countless

generations of leaders. The President is totally against starting the war because he does not want to be the man who started the war that ended civilization as we know it. He may be the President, but in McCammon's eyes he has no real power to stop the war.

In The Stand, the government is portrayed in a more sinister, deceitful way. It is much less out of control than in McCammon's portrayal of it. King shows it as a thriving center for lies and conspiracy. In his story, the truth of the government involvement with the flu epidemic begins to surface. A radio station is taken over by a group who wishes to spread the truth about the flu epidemic. They broadcast this message for about fifteen minutes until they are all killed for treason against the United States of America. This might sound unrealistic, but the Red Scare and the McCarthy hearings are a real aspect of our history and if printed in a novel would sound somewhat unbelievable as well.

Later in The Stand, a group of students is protesting against a group of soldiers guarding a quarantined area. This protest turns into a riot and nearly eighty students are shot and killed. This scenario is quite believable when one considers the events surrounding the Vietnam War. Stephen King's view of the United States government becomes very clear through events like the ones I have mentioned.

Unlike many who simply stir the pot and let it boil over, McCammon and King give examples of how they feel our government could be improved. McCammon's new type of government is very closely tied to the statements

— concerning the problems that our government has. Since McCammon feels that any government will have the snowball effect of only getting bigger and bigger, his solution to a better government is to have very little government at all. Of course this would entail retreating to a simpler existence, but in McCammon's mind, that is totally acceptable. The law of the gun, which will be discussed later under contemporary social problems, rules for the majority of the book, but his idea of a simpler existence with little government comes into play at the novel's end. Since our world after a nuclear war is mostly agrarian, there is little need for a structured, layered government. Society remains agrarian in Swan Song because of the lack of technology after a nuclear war, but also because of the realization of the inherent danger in the mad rush for technology. It is a peaceful society where rebuilding of schools and libraries is much more important than rebuilding a democracy. McCammon is not saying that there should be no government at all. He is stating that layers of government are not necessary when our existence is much simpler. No one could ever say that apocalyptic horror fiction is anti-utopian because in many ways, McCammon's vision is a near-utopia in itself.

King examines two different types of government in the post-apocalyptic world. The first is a very dark vision of government. This community is ruled by the Dark Man. His is an autocratic society that shows us that our government could easily be worse than it is. Some of his governing techniques are reminiscent of Machiavelli's The Prince. The Dark Man has a strict code that his people must follow or face dire consequences. It reminds me of the moral code that some

conservatives feel should be imposed upon people. It seems quite obvious that government cannot legislate morality, and for that matter, who is to judge whether or not something is moral? The punishment for those who do not follow the Dark Man's code ranges from torture to crucifixion. This is relevant to our society when one considers the shooting of Dr. David Gunn for the abortions he performed. The Dark Man's community also performs political assassinations on members of the other community. It would seem that one community should have no right to effect any type of justice on an unrelated community. Yet, the United States did just that in 1991. Our troops went in to capture Manuel Noriega. Despite his shady background, he was still the legitimate leader of Panama, but we took him out of the country to stand trial in the United States. It may not have been a political assassination, but the result was the same. At the very least, King makes us question some of the actions of our government.

The other governed community in The Stand is called the Free Zone. It is an example of what King feels our government must do to change for the better. His view of bettering our government revolves around reverting back to a true democracy. In the Free Zone community, large town meetings are open to all, and everyone can have their say. King shows this kind of democracy working effectively, but as the town grows, the effectiveness of this type of government begins to falter. King is cognizant of the difficulty in maintaining a direct democracy within a huge population, but he is showing that a direct democracy is the only way to avoid the secrecy and deception associated with a huge

government. The only reason that this type of government is successful in The Stand is because social classes no longer exist. There are no rich, no poor, no black, and no white. There are only people trying to build a government that will better its own community. King believes that only a direct democracy can exist without secrecy. At the same time, he questions whether or not we can truly achieve this type of democracy. It is truly a catch twenty-two.

Neither Robert McCammon's nor Stephen King's vision of an improved government is ultimately feasible. However, that does not discredit their ideas. Neither author actually believes that his vision of government is the answer. Their purpose was to make us question our government and look for ways to improve it. Although both authors feel that our government needs to head in somewhat different directions, The Stand and Swan Song achieve their goal.

One area of significant value cannot be bypassed when writing on apocalyptic horror fiction. Since apocalyptic horror novels are usually very broad in scope and are usually written with a story dealing with the present, they cover a great many social issues. King and McCammon discuss many of the problems and characteristics that make up our society. They discuss such areas as drug abuse, racism, homosexuality, abortion, education, and technology. The range of areas covered under the umbrella of social commentary on our society is so large that I obviously cannot adequately discuss all these issues in such a short time frame. Also, to do so would cause an almost certain rambling from topic to topic. I have therefore decided to cover only the areas of violence in our society, poverty,

and the mentally ill. I picked these three areas for two reasons. The first is that both authors have a great deal to say about these areas, the second reason being that I hope to maintain coherence throughout this discussion. Along with these three areas, I will also discuss what is probably the most important area of commentary dealing with our society. Both King and McCammon spend time discussing the reasons that we, as humans, are always drawn toward grouping together in a society. Even in the face of the apocalypse, the struggling survivors pull together to form a society.

Despite our desire to boast of our civilized nature, The Stand and Swan Song show that we have been and are a very violent people. Some critics would like to say that apocalyptic horror promotes violence because of all the death and destruction within the books. King and McCammon definitely do not glorify violence. They merely show, through many vivid examples, that humankind has an extremely violent nature. It is not just modern day apocalyptic horror that illustrates the violence in our society. Many great works such as Beowulf and The Iliad glorify violence much more than does apocalyptic horror. McCammon and King are not promoting violence; instead, they are simply stating the unpleasant truth about our society.

The most obvious statements about violence in our society spring from the definition of apocalyptic horror. Both novels have examples of extreme catastrophes that humankind wreaked upon itself. In The Stand, the catastrophe is caused through the biological weapons incident discussed earlier. King infers

that it is our violent nature that drove us to try to create such a malevolent weapon, and it is only fitting that we unleashed it upon ourselves. The obvious inference of violence in Swan Song is in the nuclear holocaust that decimates our world. McCammon discusses, in detail, the push and shove game that occurs between two nations as an arms race takes place. Why is there such thing as an arms race? According to McCammon, it is because we are a violent people. McCammon states in Swan Song that our violent nature quite often overcomes our dreams of being truly civilized and democratic. "...the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution ashes in the shattered Archives building, the dreams of a million minds destroyed in the inferno of the Library of Congress. And it all happened so fast." (McCammon 206).

There are numerous other inferences about our violent nature. McCammon uses a technique whereby he places his main characters in situations where he can make bold statements about our violent nature without explicitly stating his point. In the 100 pages before the war ever takes place, McCammon takes two of his main characters, one good and one evil, and makes statements about our violent nature through their actions. Joshua Hutchins is the character who is the protector of the miracle child named Swan. Before the war, Josh held the occupation of a professional wrestler. We are first introduced to Josh at a wrestling match. From the start of the match, McCammon describes a blood thirsty crowd who constantly screams for any bone breaking or blood-letting. To me, McCammon is making a statement about the nature of our society. It

— revolves around violence even in times of peace. It pervades our movies, our television, and, in McCammon's case, our sports. McCammon also uses one of his evil characters to stress the same point. Roland Croninger starts off as a boy in the novel but quickly develops into a cold-hearted man. As the story opens, he is in the car with his mother and father. In this scene, he pulls his father's gun out from underneath the seat and points it at his mother and father. He laughingly pulls the trigger twice shouting "Bang"! McCammon shows that even a nine year-old boy is not safe from the violence that permeates every level of our society. This also shows the serious gun problem in this country. It is no real surprise when, later in the novel, Roland does shoot his own father.

The Stand does not deal with the violence of our society quite as much as does Swan Song. King does deal with a very special kind of violence. Lloyd Henreid is accused of numerous counts of murder and is facing the death penalty. In this existentialist scene, Henreid ponders his own existence, and it makes the reader contemplate the reasoning for a death penalty. Is it morally right? Whether right or wrong, it exists because of our violent nature. In some countries, public executions are common and are often highly anticipated. We do not hold public executions in America because of our imaginary civilized shroud. I would venture to guess that if government executions were shown on television, they would rank right up with the ever popular and violent Superbowl.

The problems of societal violence survives the apocalypse just as people do. In both novels, the law of the gun is the new ruling hand. McCammon paints an

— eerie world where the violence continues even after the nuclear war. There is little left in McCammon's shattered landscape. Many of those left seek out guns. Guns begin to become the ruling force of the land. Armies begin to build, and the cycle of violence begins to start anew. The armies war over guns, gas, and supplies in an almost feudalistic state.

Both authors have much to say about the violence within our society. Apocalyptic horror makes the point of stressing how violent our society is without glorifying or promoting violence. This is an incredible strength of apocalyptic horror. Some might argue against the statement that apocalyptic horror only mirrors the violence in our society, but there are numerous examples in current events that prove the point of apocalyptic horror. For example, our current and previous presidents have had various degrees of popularity in opinion polls at different times of their presidency. They do share one common area when it comes to their success rate. Both Clinton and Bush have had their highest approval ratings when they have bombed Iraq. When presidents bomb and destroy, their popularity soars. This is the exact point that King and McCammon make within their respective novels. Humankind was and is a very violent creature.

Apocalyptic horror often serves to shed light on many of the problems that our society seems to want to sweep under the rug. McCammon and King both touch on one particular area through the use of very similar characters within their novels. The dilemma of what to do with the mentally ill is an area that many

people want to circumvent in our society. Both authors feel that the treatment of these people has been woefully inadequate, and they express this by showing the negative repercussions that it can have.

King and McCammon both take two characters in their novels who have been basically shunned by society because of mental problems. Stephen King portrays this through a character known as the Trashcan Man. As a child, he was somewhat of a mischievous pyromaniac. He had an affinity for fire, and it led him into trouble as his life progressed. He obviously needed help, and his affinity for burning things caused him to become a social outcast. He ended up in a mental ward where he was more of a guinea pig than a patient. He underwent radical new therapies that were quite often extremely painful. This caused his mental condition to lapse even further. In a sense, society simply avoided the problem of having to deal with him so they locked him away from decent society.

McCammon uses a similar scenario with a character by the name of Alvin Mangrim. The story progresses and we find out that Mangrim has been locked away in a mental asylum. His condition only gets worse and worse while he is there. The characters in both novels end up with extremely violent natures. This says a lot about how the authors view the state of our society and how it deals with those whom it classifies as undesirable. There is very little attempt to cure these individuals. As a consequence of societal indifference, these characters end up with very violent natures and commit heinous crimes later in their respective novels.

King and McCammon are obviously not stating that all mentally ill people should be set free, but they do state that simply hiding them from the eyes of society is not the answer. This example of how our society deals with unpleasant problems is not confined to the mentally ill. Rather, it serves as a microcosm of all the problems that our society refuses to deal with. Both authors show that hiding problems from sight only leads to violence. For years, people have ignored the injustices heaped upon many of the minorities within this country. Our desire to hide these problems is turning many of these minorities into permanent underclasses. Situations like this can only backfire with violence. For the Black community, this situation boiled long enough to the point that it erupted in the form of riots in Los Angeles in 1992. Our society ignored the problem and violence was the ultimate result - just as in The Stand and Swan Song.

There is probably no more emotionally distressing social problem today than that of poverty. To those who are not familiar with apocalyptic horror fiction, it might seem strange that poverty would be a problem discussed within the context of this genre. McCammon and King use two of their main characters to show some of the vast problems with poverty in our society. In Swan Song, the woman known as Sister ends the novel as one of the bravest and strongest women one could ever imagine reading about. She does not start out this way within the novel. McCammon first introduces her to us when she is asleep within her cardboard box in an alley of New York City. She has been homeless for numerous years and each day is a struggle to simply find enough food to stay alive. In her

search through a trash can, she finds the badly decomposed body of small child. McCammon does not use this vision to turn the reader's stomach. He uses it to show how desperate the situation is for many poverty stricken people.

King uses two main characters to discuss poverty. Stu Redman and Nick Andros both have very difficult backgrounds, and yet both emerge as true leaders within The Stand. They are both from what society would deem to be a very low social class. Stu Redman comes from a small town where no one gets out and makes it past the confines of minimum wage jobs, cheap housing, and struggling to make ends meet. Nick Andros was an orphan who moved from foster family to foster family. Since he is deaf and mute, no one wanted to keep him and he eventually struck out on his own at the age of sixteen. He struggles simply to survive. Although they have different backgrounds, all three of these characters assume vital roles in the struggle for survival.

King and McCammon both stress the point that poverty-stricken people can contribute to society in a very positive way. Unlike some conservatives would have us believe, many poverty-stricken people desperately wish to get off welfare so that they may achieve the goals that seem so far out of reach. They have no choice because they are trapped in a cycle of poverty that turns from one generation to the next. McCammon and King show that these people can become leaders when given the chance. There is no real difference between the wealthy and the poor other than a different hand dealt to them by fate. Both authors state that the poor need only to be given a chance to help themselves.

Despite all the problems that occur within an organized society, we are constantly drawn toward grouping together as a social unit. Organization quite clearly causes numerous social problems within these two novels, but the people within them cling to some semblance of social order. In Swan Song, a small group of people are trapped by wolves and the freezing cold in a small cabin in the mountains. Due to the aftermath of the nuclear war, many of these people are teetering on the edge of insanity. The only hope that keeps them sane is that somewhere there is still something left of society and civilization. In The Stand, King states that people need other people to keep them from going crazy with loneliness. It sounds simple but is very true. The character, Nick Andros, states that the apocalypse was like a cherry bomb thrown into a child's toy box. Now, we have to put things back into order. Putting things back in order is the goal of most of the characters in both novels.

In Swan Song, the first community to form is known as Mary's Rest. The community is, at first, full of people who are only concerned with themselves, but that situation slowly begins to change. People start talking to one another and trading items back and forth. Soon a community is working to plant crops. They even start up a small weekly flyer containing town events and occurrences.

A community known as the Free Zone forms in The Stand. The community begins with simple friendships, but a governing body is soon formed. The electricity is re-established in the community. Like McCammon, King shows the great desire of the characters to reform a community despite all the social

problems that are associated with it. The characters in both novels want to start up a society again in the hope that maybe they can learn from the mistakes of the past.

Both authors show vast social problems in our society. With the reforming of society, the people seem to be trying to create a society that learned from the mistakes of the past. Some of the problems that are so evident in society before the apocalypse begin to surface again in the new societies. Obviously, they are small in proportion because these societies are in their infancies, but the seeds have still been planted. It seems to be a classic dilemma to say that people need society, but society brings a myriad of problems. Both authors make this very evident. King and McCammon are not saying that we can do nothing about our social problems, but it will take a unified effort to achieve a better society. Neither author is blatantly anti-utopian. King leans much more toward anti-utopian viewpoints than does McCammon. Neither author states that our society will ever be perfect. However, they do not state that we are funneling downward either. Both point to somewhere in the middle. They show that our problems need to be addressed if we hope to improve our society. This effort will include more than just lip service or a handful of people trying to change things. McCammon's book sets a goal of a near utopia. It is a very simple society, but it was achieved by people who cared enough to make changes.

Apocalyptic horror often goes into discussing the lives of people. The discussion is often an area of great misconception by those who know little of this

genre. Why discuss the lives of people in apocalyptic horror? It is necessary to discuss their lives so that characters may be developed more fully. This enables the reader to gain a better understanding of humanity. Much of the commentary made by King and McCammon is not nearly as pronounced as the areas of politics, religion, and social problems but makes it no less valid an area for discussion. The commentary within this realm is more subtle, but it does outline much about humanity. Both authors discuss aspects of the family, aspects of power and responsibility, and the idea of carpe diem. Although, on the surface, these ideas may seem unrelated, the lives of the different characters in the novels show how all of these aspects relate to the life of a human being.

The Stand and Swan Song detail different problems that can occur within a family. Many people who read apocalyptic horror can relate to some of these problems. The authors do not try to show families as lacking morality as some might believe. Instead, they discuss problems so that we all might better understand them. In our society, children often feel the brunt of many of the problems that occur in a family. This is illustrated in apocalyptic horror. In The Stand, Frannie Goldsmith reflects upon her childhood as she walks into her parents' home. She thinks of the parlor which is the room she never understood: a room where there was no yawning, no sneezing, no coughing, and only polite conversation that never amounted to anything. Soon after, she accidentally knocks over a potted plant and dirties this sacred room. This sparks off the true feeling between Frannie and her mother. Her mother becomes enraged at the accident.

Frannie tries to apologize, but her mother sees only a small child who dared to dirty the sacred room. Frannie tries to reach out, but her mother shows no compassion and kicks Frannie out of the house. King is saying that too many people bring children into this world with little idea of the responsibility that it entails. The single most important concept for a parent to understand is support. Frannie's mother did little to support her daughter, and it destroyed their fragile relationship.

McCammon shows a similar household in Swan Song. Colonel Macklin ends up leading a massive army with a genocidal purpose that rivals Hitler's. Macklin starts out in a family much like Frannie's family. Macklin's father wanted discipline and control over his son. Discipline was the key to raising children. Consequently, Macklin became a soldier where the ideas of discipline and control were reinforced. McCammon makes use of a symbolic character known as the shadow soldier. The character exists only in Macklin's mind but serves as a constant reminder to him that discipline and control are the true rules to live by. This type of absolute discipline will do nothing but destroy our society. Creativity and free expression are the cornerstones of freedom. To stifle creativity in our youth is the quickest way to extinguish the flame of hope that grows ever fainter in our world. Like King, McCammon illustrates that the way to raise children, who will create a brighter future, is to nurture creativity and support the initiative of children.

Although supporting creativity in our youth is a start, children eventually

— leave their families and use their values in many different ways. As people grow, more responsibility and authority is placed upon their shoulders. How people deal with this is often the truest test of character. McCammon and King both show that the best leaders are never those who actively seek and desire power. They illustrate this by showing examples of the kinds of leadership that ensues from both those who desire power and those who accept leadership in the face of adversity.

I will again use the character of Colonel Macklin in Swan Song. Throughout the novel, his goal is to gain more land, guns, and power. This obsession for acquiring power ultimately leads to his own destruction. He is gunned down by his first-in-command. King makes the same point in The Stand. Harold Lauder milk starts the novel as an overweight boy who was never accepted by people. When ninety percent of the population dies, Harold sees this as a chance for him to start a new life and to achieve the success and recognition that eluded him in the past. This dream is again thwarted as he continues to underachieve. He becomes very bitter and full of rage. He becomes so hateful that he murders some of those who achieved success while he did not. Like Macklin, Harold's pursuit of power ends in violence and ultimately his own destruction. The examples of dictators who have actively sought out power are too numerous to mention. Although some may have achieved and retained this power through Machiavellian means, this drive for power ended in their downfall. The drive for power is a long road of corruption, greed, and betrayal and is never

where true leaders are found.

True leaders accept responsibility in the face of adversity and rise to meet the occasion. In The Stand, Larry Underwood was a shallow man before the holocaust. He rarely accepted any responsibility for his actions. After the plague, many survivors look to Larry for leadership. Although he does not want this responsibility, he reluctantly accepts it and becomes one of the most heroic leaders in The Stand. McCammon shows the same type of scenario through his main character, Swan. As she grows and begins to realize her power to heal the land, many look to her for leadership. She feels as though she is only a child and not yet ready to lead others. Ultimately, she accepts the responsibility and becomes a true leader. This idea, presented by McCammon and King, has been proven time and again. The great leaders of our time such as Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr. were not men who lusted after power. They accepted the responsibility and became true leaders.

Carpe Diem is a prominent theme throughout both novels. Seize the day can have drastically different effects for different people. For some, the message is perverted into a reasoning for war. King shows how Harold Lauder milk uses this idea in this manner. He views it as meaning to do whatever is necessary to placate his desire for power. In Swan Song, Colonel Macklin uses carpe diem in this same manner. He uses it as reasoning for starting wars to increase the amount of land and guns he can acquire. Both characters distort the true meaning of this simple yet so important phrase. They use it for personal gain.

Much of the wealth disparity in this country is caused by persons following a similar type of credo.

The true meaning of carpe diem is illustrated in both novels. In McCammon's book, *Swan*, the main character, helps to rebuild the war torn country and still manages to find love in a dark world. She fulfills her desires and truly lives out the ideals that are incorporated into carpe diem. To seize the day is the only way to ever truly know one's self. Even more importantly, it is the only way to ever be at peace with one's self.

This was not nearly a comprehensive summary of the commentary on people within The Stand and Swan Song. It is a mere sampling organized into three categories in order to show a small part of the various aspects of humanity in each author's vision. Apocalyptic horror has a definite purpose in its character development beyond simply developing the plot. The authors present many aspects of people to teach us a little about ourselves and to show the unique nature of humanity. Understanding and expressing a little about people is a subtle but important message present in apocalyptic horror fiction.

Religion is an area that can rarely be avoided in apocalyptic horror. It is a perfect setting for associating a great many religious issues and discussing the positive and negative side to religious fervor. Religion is an area where apocalyptic horror is often criticized. It is quite often said to be full of devil-induced text that lacks any moral value. Nothing could be further from the truth. Numerous references to God or some all powerful being are made throughout The

Stand. There are parts of both novels where characters question the existence of God, but these are well-thought, existentialist questions that are no more evil minded than Sartre's The Wall. Many Christian people have pondered the same questions at some point in their lives.

The commentary about religion is one of the major differences between McCammon and King. King devotes much of his religious discussions to creating the image of a fire and brimstone type of God. To be more precise, his image of God is very much like the image one forms when reading many of the passages in the old testament of the Bible. McCammon avoids the issue of actually detailing God as portrayed in the Bible. Although he makes many references to a power beyond this world, he devotes much less time than King does to describing the characteristics of God. His discussion deals more with the positive and negative aspects of holding fervent religious convictions. Even with these differences, both authors show similarities in their existentialist discussions between the characters.

The Stand discusses a very difficult, arduous God. The proverbial "eye for an eye" is very representative of the image that King portrays through his character known as Mother Abigail. She is an old woman who has held fervent Christian beliefs all of her life. After the plague strikes, many of the survivors begin to dream about her. She becomes a symbol for all that is good in the shattered world. She is the ultimate representation of what is good in the world, and she is the center of much of King's discussion about God. The hard aspects

about God that King portrays are not his only visions of God in The Stand. Mother Abigail does attribute much of her longevity to her firm belief in God. However, that belief does not blind her to the many difficult aspects of being a Christian and following God. "Every man or woman who loves Him, they hate Him too, ...in this world he's apt to repay service with pain while those who do evil ride over the roads in Cadillac cars." (King, The Stand, 511). She is tested by her God throughout the novel. She has to withstand long, hard journeys with little food and only her arthritic legs to carry her. The tests she must perform are very reminiscent of those that Job had to perform in the Bible. Just like Job, Mother Abigail's attitude was that of "the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." (Job 1:21).

There are numerous other biblical issues in The Stand. The concepts of abortion and the right to life are discussed. King even hints that Mother Abigail is a prophet - perhaps not a prophet who foresees the second coming of Christ, but she does inspire hope in the struggling survivors and stands as a symbol of hope for what could be. King even compares the plague to the destruction detailed in Revelations. It is true that there are no earthquakes or seas turning to blood as in the opening of the sixth and seventh seals, but there is an ultimate battle between good and evil for the fate of the world.

McCammon's approach to religious discussion is much less God-versus-Satan oriented. He takes a more thought provoking and less Biblical approach by discussing the good and bad of religion. Within the first ten pages, discussions

about religious terrorism appear. Holy wars and religious terrorism are quite common today in many parts of the world. McCammon makes many statements about religious wars in his novel. In the nuclear wasteland, numerous armies begin to form and search for almost any reason to fight. As with any army, the fighting helps to keep the army focused and under the control of one leader. Many leaders pick a religious purpose so that their followers will be more willing to die for the cause.

Two armies show this type of religious warfare. The Army of Excellence has a goal to rid the country of the Mark of Cain. This mark is actually brown growths created by the radiation, but the army uses this to motivate its soldiers. The leaders refer to it as the Mark of Satan and instill the belief that all those infected with this mark must be killed in God's name. This is very similar to the wars in the Middle East. Each side claims that Allah is on their side and that the other side is the embodiment of evil. To feel that one is dying in the name of God is an extremely powerful motivator. The American Allegiance is the other army that McCammon uses to make a statement about some of the negative aspects of religion. This army follows a specific belief of a god that is much different, and anyone who will not succumb to this belief will be killed. McCammon is able to draw the reader into this scenario before the relevance to the Crusades becomes evident. The objective behind the Crusades was to recover the Holy Land and convert those who were willing. Those who would not convert were killed. McCammon effectively shows some of the negative effects of religious beliefs in

Swan Song.

Even when illustrating the positive side of religion, McCammon still does not state that the Bible is the absolute truth. He takes the point of a neutral observer and shows how a belief in God can help strengthen one's character. McCammon suggests that religious belief gives many people the strength to go on. McCammon does make some references to God and includes magic that could only have spawned from supernatural forces.

The last area of religion that King and McCammon cover deals with existentialism. Existentialist discussion is quite possibly the reason that horror fiction is considered anti-Christian. Apocalyptic horror does sometimes question the existence of God, but it questions God's existence no more than many Christians have done at one point in their lives. The existentialist discussion is very respectful of religion, but it does make the reader think. Is there a God or was she/he simply created to fill the empty void that would be left without the promise of everlasting paradise? Was God created so that one group could control another group? These questions are addressed in the discussions of many of the characters. One of King's characters states that people are too frightened to accept the idea that we are an evolutionary mishap. He states that religion serves only to fill the void that cannot yet be explained by science and technology.

McCammon discusses this area in more detail than does King. When the character named Sister finds a small body in the trash in New York City, she swaddles the limp body in her arms and cries out "Where are You!" This

— sentiment is echoed by many who wonder how God could create humanity and watch it suffer. This viewpoint is felt by many characters as they sift through debris to find body after body. The guilty and the innocent were killed. There was no trial, no jury, but only mass executions. It is easy to believe in God wholeheartedly when you are young and idealistic. As one grows older, a cloud of cynicism begins to appear and you begin to doubt a little more each day. McCammon shows this when one of his characters states the following: "I used to be an optimist a long time ago. I used to believe in miracles, but do you know what happened? I got older." (McCammon 256).

It may seem from my discussion that McCammon and King are trying to dissuade one's beliefs, but this is not the case. Never does either author try to persuade the reader to abandon his or her religious beliefs. In fact, much of the discussions supports holding religious beliefs. Neither author is trying to convince the reader that there is or is not a God. Both The Stand and Swan Song discuss religion from many different viewpoints, some positive and some negative. Apocalyptic horror discusses religion to open up new ideas for the reader to contemplate. Between the two novels, virtually every side of religion has been addressed. The reason for looking at so many sides of religion is to open up new ideas for thought.

The use of symbolism is sometimes considered the dividing line between entertainment fiction and fiction with serious intellectual substance. Although I agree that symbolism is a powerful tool, I do not believe that it is, in any way, a

dividing line. Nevertheless, I will show that apocalyptic horror exhibits some very creative and definitive symbolism.

On the surface, it may appear that there is a great deal more symbolism in McCammon's book than in King's book. This peculiarity is because I am more familiar with Swan Song. I view symbolism in fiction much in the same way I view poetry. A person is not always going to appreciate all of the symbolism a work of literature contains in the first reading. It often takes multiple readings to fully embrace the author's ideas. Therefore, I will not attempt to cover all of the symbolism in either novel. To accomplish this would be an extremely arduous task and a paper within itself. My goal is to skip over some of the more obvious symbolism within the two texts and discuss more hidden symbolism that I feel has extreme importance. Apocalyptic horror is much more than entertainment fiction. It offers some complex and intellectually stimulating examples of symbolism that show both truth and hope.

Apocalyptic horror often goes into the human mind to find its symbolism. This is the case with King's examination of dreams in The Stand. These dreams serve to further the plot and to show extreme examples of good and evil within the book. Many of the characters within the book begin to have similar dreams. There are two basic dreams that permeate the sleep of every main character. One is a dream of an old woman who many believe is the last hope for good in the world. The other dream is of a dark man whose presence is the embodiment of evil. These two dreams symbolize torches that lead the way to one side or the

other. All the characters have both of the dreams, but it is up to them to determine which flame to follow and whether or not they will succumb to fear and the promise of power. In the dreams, the characters begin to see actual towns that will help to direct them to one side or the other. King uses these dreams to show that all people have a choice between what is right and what is wrong. People must examine themselves and find out who they are. Only then can they choose a path to follow.

King also effectively symbolizes many of the fears that people must face in their lives through the use of the Lincoln Tunnel. One of King's characters named Larry Underwood comes to area that cannot be circumvented without going through the Lincoln Tunnel. He is petrified at the thought of going into a mile long tunnel that is totally dark and littered with corpses. Although he is frightened, he has no choice but to cross through the tunnel if he wants to get out of Manhattan. The tunnel symbolizes the fears that all people face when they come to a crossroads in their lives. There is no easy way out. King makes it clear that the only solution is for people to face their fears. Larry ends up fighting back his fears and goes through the tunnel. He later becomes a leader. Facing our fears is the only way we can ultimately realize our potential.

McCammon takes a much different approach to symbolism by showing that apocalyptic horror has many devices to exhibit symbolism. Although the dreams in King's novels are somewhat supernatural, McCammon uses a much more direct, supernatural symbolism in his fiction. Much of the symbolism revolves around

magic and mystery. The magic could be said to be only for entertainment purposes, but I feel that it shows serious thought and variety.

Magic is probably the most potent symbol within Swan Song. McCammon wields this tool very effectively in his portrayal of the glass circle. Sister, one of the main characters, finds a glass circle about the size of a crown. When she picks up the glass circle, it explodes into a rainbow of brilliant colored lights. When any character holds the glass circle, they go on what McCammon calls dream walking. It is not real; and yet the characters see and feel the places that they go as if they were really there. The circle oftentimes shows them much of the good that is left in the world and offers hope for tomorrow. "That sand is about the most worthless stuff in the world, yet look what sand can become in the right hands... I want to believe that all the beauty in the world isn't dead yet." (McCammon, Swan Song, 236).

The glass circle is not the only symbol of hope that McCammon uses in Swan Song. Swan has the power to bring life to long-dead plants. Her first use of this power is to bring life to one tree and five ears of corn. This seems like a trivial accomplishment considering the massive starvation that is occurring. These small feats are symbols of hope to the people in the novels. This motivates them to pull together and work hard to build a better tomorrow. McCammon, again, shows the strong use of symbolism in apocalyptic horror. These symbols are definitely not the parting of the Red Sea, but they do not have to be. They keep alive the tiny flame of optimism in a sea of pessimism. These symbols of

— hope extend beyond the confines of the novel. If these people can find hope in such a desolate world, it makes one more optimistic about the chances of our society surviving.

Not all of McCammon's symbols involve hope for our world. Some of his symbols are warnings. Since the time of Shelley's Frankenstein, the symbolism of horror has often served to warn. Apocalyptic horror warns of the outcomes when technology races ahead of wisdom. Besides the general overtures of the apocalypse, McCammon makes use of subtle symbols to warn us. One of the characters is placing out a display of Tarot cards. The card of death is turned over, and pictured is a ghostly skeleton with a scythe reaping the fields of humanity. The message here is much more than the danger of nuclear weapons. This is not a Biblical Satan. Rather, it is a symbol of the destruction that we unleashed upon ourselves. Our fate is in our own hands. There is no supernatural force that will determine the fate of the world. It is our world and its final destiny is in our hands.

The final example of the symbolism in Swan Song that I will discuss is McCammon's strongest. In the book of Job, God emphasizes to Satan the devout following of Job. Job is then put through a variety of horrible tests to see if he would renounce God. In effect, Satan wanted to see what was really inside of Job. In Swan Song, many of the characters have a tough growth that covers their faces. These growths are referred to as Job's mask. Toward the book's end, the growths begin to break off. There is an extreme difference in what lies beneath the mask.

— For some people, the mask falls off to reveal beauty, and for others, it reveals a hideously deformed face. The face that has been brought to the surface is the inner face of the individual. Job's Mask is a test of one's inner character. It symbolizes the ultimate test that Job had to face. Who am I? The new face gives a physical representation to that question. The meaning is that no matter how someone tries to deceive themselves, they can never truly hide from their own character.

The symbolism that I have discussed is not exhaustive of the symbolism which exists in either book. It is a representative sample of each novel and apocalyptic horror in general. These examples might not even be the best examples available in the novels. Symbolism is unique for every individual. Different people can see different things in the same symbol. This is why symbolism is such a valuable tool in apocalyptic horror. It expresses important points in a way that can be seen differently by people.

What is the future of horror fiction? Many people believe that horror saw its apogee with the abundance of films in the 1980's. These types of films have dirtied the image of horror, but it cannot completely obscure the incredible works that exist. Apocalyptic horror is a boundless ground for explaining virtually any issue that needs to be discussed. There is no direction that an author cannot go. The setting for this genre provides a limitless area for discussing the human condition. When humanity is faced with ultimate adversity, an author can show many of the true characteristics of humanity. It is the ultimate ground for

discussing the resolve of humanity.

Apocalyptic horror deserves a worthy place in literature because of its realism in portraying the human condition. My discussion to prove this is intentionally limited. It would be impossible to cover all the strengths of apocalyptic horror. I have used Swan Song and The Stand to show that many areas of intellectual value are covered in this often overlooked genre. People, religion, society, and politics are quite an array of topics to cover in any novel. Many of these same issues are discussed in the best tragedies of Shakespeare. Although some of the beauty of Shakespeare's language has been lost, apocalyptic horror covers many of the same issues and promotes intellectual thought.

The most positive aspect of apocalyptic horror is the feeling after reading a novel such as Swan Song or The Stand. Although many areas of current interest are discussed, the future is the ultimate question of apocalyptic horror. These novels are quite vivid and terrifying in their description of the post-apocalyptic world. The point is not to terrify without a purpose. The authors are trying to open our eyes to the world around us and show us one possible future. The characters in the novels face despair, but they continue to struggle in their world. They eventually triumph in the face of ultimate adversity. It is quite easy to become cynical in our troubled world. At the same time, these obstacles seem small to those that the characters face in apocalyptic horror. It makes me feel that there is a chance for our world after all. It helps to motivate people to realize that we can make a better tomorrow. This will not happen through political

speeches about an America that we can once again regain. The true evolution of our world into a peaceful society will not come through political negotiations and peace treaties. As is shown in apocalyptic horror, true hope for our world lies in a love and respect for our fellow human beings.

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